



The Way Africa Entered the Millennium

Trousers and Skirts Down or Head High: A Commentary

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The Way Africa Entered the Millennium: Trousers and Skirts Down or Head High: A Commentary

Mammo Muchie¹

Abstract

The post-colonial African state appears exhausted after the surgical operation without anesthetics through the bitter medicine of structural adjustment administered by the institutions grouped as the "Washington consensus." The African state has not recovered and does not appear to know its role after the rude treatment from the World Bank and the IMF. The much heralded expected seismic changes after the cold war did not appear to have blessed Africa with any improvement in its economic and political life. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet system were expected to bring happy tidings to the developing world in general and Africa in particular. A global democratic wind of change was supposed to sweep away the nasty intervention of the African military which has sadly imposed on the African political space a vicious game made all the more criminal and cruel by the alacrity with which African politics was played out as tragic, a farce, a circus and recreation-all at the same time. The Congo basin is as rich in minerals as being a magnet for mercenaries, arms dealers, arms companies, and regional intervention. It has "one of the biggest battlefields in African history...dubbed as Africa's First World War." (*Herald Tribune* February 7, 2000) There has been a military coup in the Ivory Coast. Poverty and violence remain a burden on Africa's shoulders. How is Africa faring politically, economically and in conflict reduction spheres as it is entering the 21st century? This article will discuss the changes in politics, economics and conflict reductions after the so-called third wave democratization made possible by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union.

POLITICAL CHANGES IN AFRICA

The early part of the decolonisation period in the 60s saw a real democratic awakening along with the national liberation movement. This early and heady start was foully/rudely interrupted by the intervention of the military in

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practically every African state. Neither political stability nor the transition from one set of civilian and/or military elites to another became constitutional, predictable and consistent. Africa fell into the wrong hands and the population's quality of life was degraded and in fact social decay became the lot for the ordinary person. The French social philosopher

Rousseau asked a prescient question: "What is the object of political association?" He answered his own question. "It is the preservation and prosperity of its members." He continued asking: "What is the surest sign that they are preserved and prosperous?" Rousseau replied reflecting the situation of his time: "Increase of their number." Today we should substitute "quality of life improvement" rather than number of people as the indicator of the quality of governance. A system of governance which improves the quality of life of the citizen can be invariably the best. That, under which the people diminish and decay, is the worst. One cannot say that Africans have designed and established political associations which free the human being from all forms of constraints and disadvantages to increase the well-being freedom, well-being agency, functioning and capacity of the individual (Sen, 1995). Subtractive and divisive well-being (e.g. torture, extra-judicial killings, unlawful arrests, ethnic cleansing and so on) foreclose the freedom and opportunities for human fulfillment in Africa. An ethically informed social arrangement anchored on a credible theory of justice is lacking in Africa. To quote J. Rousseau,

How to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before. This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract holds the solution.

(J. J. Rousseau 1983 [1762]: 71-5)

It is not that the political association for government is grotesquely inadequate. It is that whatever association exists has been experienced as a hazard and danger to the security of African well-being. For example, when political power passes from one soldier to another often via the typical mechanism of transfer - an anti-constitutional putsch or coup, the casual observer was quick to pile up the cynical remarks on Africa with characteristic immediacy. Here goes Africa again- "the place where nothing seems to work and everything negative seems to take place." That oppressive image of negative prominence is accentuated the more the soldiers did their lethal acts against the African interest to organize peoples' daily living specially with the view to lift up the disadvantaged rural and urban majority. It became an accepted wisdom that after the continent's first dance of freedom in the 60s, things were not going in Africa's favor. The continent turned into a playground for one unscrupulous and nameless soldier

after another to defy the popular will and exercise a forcible and illegal seizure of state power. Rising from obscurity to impose mediocrity became the order of the day. Undistinguished and unremarkable men in uniform took history by the throat. By the same hand they try to throttle history, they too were throttled often by other soldiers who easily turned disloyal and did not blink an eye in brutally crucifying their one time pals. It is as if the gladiatorial contest of ancient Rome is being enacted in the African political setting with none of the rules of the game of that ancient bestial practice observed by the African men of violence who chose the moment to strike against their likes when the soldiers in power least expected their own overthrow. Those in power are often blinded by their own hubris and arrogance which make them imagine an inexplicable feeling of security at the very moment they are faced with mortal and maximum danger.

The logic of illegal seizures of power by successive hordes of military men is related to the building up of a violent, chaotic and unpredictable model in the transfer of power in Africa. The transition from one set of military elites to another followed neither constitutional norms nor political principles. Dictatorship became the rule, the norm and the law. But the price of dictatorship is not just too expensive to the population suffering from it, but also it "eats the very agents of dictatorship alive too!" The African political space became a theatrical stage where the drama of a soldier who forced his way into power played itself out by reckoning with his own inevitable demise. Soldier after soldier seems only to wait for his turn to be ousted often violently by another soldier in a similar fashion to what the immediate predecessor did. It is as if the ascendancy to power was a poisoned chalice to all aspirants of power. This drama was enacted with sickening regularity signifying a pattern where the rise and fall of a dictator involved terror as the prime instrument of change and transition of political power with ineluctable inevitability. Very often a dictator becomes forced into a life of deserved obscurity by the same process that he himself forced and imposed himself on the people in the first place against their will. These unremarkable soldiers whose only distinction is in wielding arms possessing neither learning nor imagination cluttered African politics through their constant comings and goings. Their rule was as irrelevant to the people as it was a crushing burden too cruel to bear by the ordinary human being-child, son, daughter, mother and father and households and communities.

In Africa it became almost a law-like fixture that as dictators casually ascended, they also casually descended. They came, they killed, they stole and they vanished from memory and history only to leave behind another of their kind, a self-selecting soldier to climb the stage and run amok over everyone for a while and expire into nothingness. They turned Africa into a sea of trouble and

conflict and a place where hardly a state, a political and business class can emerge with any credible degree of coherence and stability. The military rulers attracted and became the repositories of primordial loyalties rendering African politics "incoherent and unable to establish a common purpose, including a development project." (Ake, 1995) The insolent and reckless soldiers left a litany of "state types" in the wake after the litters of their rule which scholars have variously characterized as "vampire-like," "criminal," "parasitic," "venal," "wasteful," "rent-seeking", "rhizome-like", and "kleptomaniac." And such negative appellations continue to pile up the more tyrannical and burdensome the states in the continent become! Thus if there is any distinction to be attributed to these men in uniform who dragged Africa back to the abyss not very different to the time of colonial slavery by the mere fact of wielding the means of death, it is the distinction of their singular lack of distinction-exhibiting a stunted historical imagination made all the more obscene by their vicarious delight in tying history and politics to their own (and including their kith and kin's and loyal friends) "politics of their belly." (Bayart, 1999) They degrade state action and policy by imposing private reason to curb/submerge public purpose. Such misdirection's and misuse have prompted scholarly inquiry about the infamous "criminalisation" of the African state (*ibid.*). When criminals lead, imagination, thought and moral purpose will be expelled. The stealing is legally sanctioned by virtue of the fact that the patrimonialist soldiers have a firm grip on power. Mobutu stole for over a generation the richest part of Africa. He literally gutted the heart of Africa-the Congo Basin with his foreign backers. The country has been plunged back to a similar state it was in the 60s. Lumumba's ringing call for the African with ideas to be given the opportunity remains still a dream. His message that "We shall show the world what the black man can do when he is allowed to work in freedom" remained frustrated from realization by internal and external actors ranged against Africa's interest." (*New African*, February 2000) The leaders like Mobutu bleed a country and people and betray Africa and Africans. Nkrumah's "ye shall seek the political kingdom and all will fall in place" was reduced by these men with their monopoly over violence into: "ye shall beg for grants and loans" and stash the money in foreign banks for private use!

Was military intervention in African politics inevitable? Why did the military intervene so routinely in African politics? Are there structural reasons which allowed this political promiscuity by the military? What is the balance between the military as an agency and the socio-economic and political processes and structures in African society and economy? While structures set broad limits and the post-colonial economy, polity and culture are fragmented, fragile and weak, there is a role for human agency. And the military seems to have developed as a "class" to protect its own interest and specially those from the

civil sector and within the military loyal to any of the group who controls power. As long as power control brought immediate economic benefit, the gate was open for any aspirant to seize political power just as a compulsive gambler would think of becoming a millionaire instantly by buying a lottery ticket. Agency attains the status of a lottery draw. And the military was ready to manifest its agency regardless of the limits of the structural factors within Africa's social-economy. They reveal a tyrannical agency transgressing any structural constraint.

The question is whether the military can be curbed and learn some democratic norms and laws due to third wave democratization and various external conditionalities to improve governance. Is the patrimonial political and kleptomaniac economic orientation which prevailed in the African continent on the basis of the singular dominance and restriction of the African political space by the military malaise changing or not? Are the soldiers gone for good or do they remain to jump in search of fortune should the opportunity beckons? Has the criminalisation of the African state been consigned to the dustbin of history? What positive energy, if any, blew to Africa since the fall of the Berlin Wall?

THE SECOND WAVE OF DEMOCRATIZATION: IS THE MILITARY RETREATING FROM INTERVENTION IN AFRICAN POLITICS?

The military has not completely gone to the barracks. In Benin, a military coup leader after having been ousted managed to use the electoral framework to come back as a civilian. In Nigeria, the current elected president was himself a military man who held power after the murder of a Nigerian general who executed a coup himself. There are undoubtedly many instances where soldiers like wolves in sheepskin, undressed their uniform to wear civilian dress in the hope of acquiring office. As long as holding political power is like winning a lottery and becoming instantly a millionaire and a wealth holder and builder, it is hard to see how much impact can an external environment in favor of democracy change the internal conditions in Africa.

Be that as it may, there is a second wave of democratization in Africa since 1989 which can be attributable to the fall of the Wall if not wholly to it but at least in part. Some forty elections have been held since 1989\1990. In 22 cases the incumbent holder of state power was returned and sixteen were replaced. Most of these came from the men in uniform! For example, Ghana's president Rawlings was a flight lieutenant in the air force. In 1995 twelve elections were held. (Barratt-Brown, 1995). In some cases after election came civil war (e.g. Angola and Sierra Leone). In some other cases the winner of an election was sent to jail (e.g. Abiola of Nigeria). In most cases multi party elections took place (e.g. Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and so on). In some cases non-party

elections or single party elections were undertaken (e.g. Uganda). In Mali, a former NGO leader became president. There were cases of military putsch in Niger where Colonel Abraham Bare in 1996 intervened by awarding himself the country's presidential power ostensibly to settle the dispute between the president elect and the parliament.

While election and multi-party competition have been campaigned for by the lenders who insist on "good governance" as the condition for their loan, the democratic transition in Africa broadly remains fragile. Its root remains shallow. Civil society actors have mushroomed specially NGOs wishing to monitor the activities of the state often funded by western sources. Political election campaigns have been violent and took very often nasty ethnic and partisan characters. The old soldiers often camouflaged themselves as democrats when they are still autocrats. Multiparty elections have been manipulated by incumbent rulers often creating fictitious organizations to disorient the opposition elements and weaken them. Opposition forces are often politically immature, divided and feeble. Elections are known to show gross irregularities and western observers pass them cynically by saying, it is "fair" and okay "under African standards!" Other related problems include threats to national disintegration, continued presence of dictatorship, elite exploitation of the pressure to democratize by inventing a slick tactic of spouting insincerely "democratic rhetoric while practicing dictatorial practice." The most worrying aspect to the African democratic transition is the lack of any deal to the poverty ridden rural and urban disadvantaged population. Democracy has become to mean no more than the recycling of technocratic elites without structural changes in the organization of Government and economy. That enduring deficiency is in part due to the external advice which limits the content and scope of democracy to elections and multi-party competition irrespective of the specific context for democratic expression.

The most significant positive consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall is in yielding South Africa's historical compromise where radicalized South African capital conceded black African majority rule. The death of political apartheid (though economic apartheid still exists!) has been stimulated and South Africa along with Mauritius and Botswana can rightly boast of a consolidated democratic transition. All of them have undergone more than one election and it has been said to be broadly free and fair. If a transition can be effectuated via election a few times, one expects these may be repeated again.

In Africa now we have had non-party elections twice (e.g. Uganda), ethnic federal elections where politics is organized on the basis of ethnic representation and presence (e.g. Ethiopia, the second is scheduled for May,

2000!); imposed multi-party election as a result of the campaign and inducement or blackmail from the Bretton Woods institutions (e.g. Kenya) The South African type advanced constitutional order is a model unto itself. There is also the yet untried Pan-African grass roots based networked democracy based on an African identity of citizenship. This remains a future option requiring a Pan-African vision of the type espoused by Kwame Nkrumah to translate into reality (Nkrumah, 2000, pp. 18-25).

Overall the key political change which came from the fall of the Berlin Wall is the forcing of the African civilian and military technocratic elite to nod and wink its acceptance of an election regime to legitimize even their own taking control of the state. While this is a significant improvement from employing coup and murder for effectuating transition and power transfer, it is still far off from establishing a sustainable democratic transition in Africa. Democracy is still a long way off in the deeper sense of freeing the African disadvantaged population from the economic, social and political constraints universally imposed upon them by the formal and informal condominium of transnational and African elites. Perhaps a window to democracy has been open; the door to it yet remains to be found and opened in order to forge an African society of liberty, human well-being, capability, functioning, dignity and humanity.

ECONOMIC CHANGES IN AFRICA

While the political consequence after the 1989 episode has been mixed, the economic consequence to Africa (can be attributable in part to the fall of the wall) appears to be broadly negative. It seems a key consequence of the 1989 episode is to stimulate further the Reagan-Thatcher insistent to turn the global economic space into one gigantic bazaar or "free market." As soon as the Soviet system collapsed, the interest on Africa waned somewhat. Capital and the Western Governments looked to Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia. The novelty of imposing a market economy on the new territories of the former Soviet Union and Eastern and Central European regions took precedence over Africa which was dying from the stringent austerity measures imposed to discipline (in fact cripple) the African post-colonial state.

Indeed the 1980s was an exceptionally difficult decade for Africa. Some 15 countries had negative rates of growth. Some like Senegal barely maintained the previous low rate of growth. Hardly any had growth rates above 5%. Population was growing faster than food and agriculture (UNIDO, 1998). The Reagan-Thatcher activist agitation against the state in general and the African state in particular (as implemented by the World Bank and IMF) made Africa's predicament more severe. Marketing boards which kept food prices with a planned ceiling were dismantled and consequently food prices sky rocketed.

Infrastructure education and health collapsed. The low point (nadir) was reached in 1985. As the World Bank's chief for the region said in 1992, "Sub-Saharan African countries were in an economic free fall: no goods on the shelves, no spare parts, no chalk in the classrooms, no drugs in the clinics and so on. Budgets were out of control, debt was piling up, institutions were decaying, social indicators were falling, and, in substantial parts of Africa, famine stalked the land." (Barratt-Brown, 1995, Ch.4) I myself observed Nairobi University's library where the latest books except for some references were 1972! The journals were so dated, one wonders how catastrophic and demoralizing this state of affairs must have been to staff. Most staff try to make ends meet by doing extra academic work. Their salary is so low it has negative impact on their performance and profession.

The state was unable to meet any of the demands of the population. The advice of the Anglo-American dominated "Washington consensus" is to worsen the problem by demanding the further retreat of the state. The more the population was alienated, the bigger the call by the lenders for the state to withdraw even further from the arena of public provisions. The state was condemned to vacate the economic arena, to use Lenin's metaphor "to whither away" from economic and social support to the vulnerable and the disadvantaged majority. In theory, the state is perhaps the only institution which can address issues of justice without giving in to sectarian temptations. In practice, in Africa the state was more patrimonial than "just". Though it lacked justice to frame its policy approaches, it took tasks such as education and health as public provisions. To make it withdraw wholly from public economic life is to remove the potential agency for reaching even some sections of the population despite the fact the state could not reach the majority. And it is a far away cry from providing services based on the principle of justice and fairness. "The campaigners of democracy, good governance and free market" decided that the state must be disciplined and the population needs to sacrifice. The pain is said to be worth it, for the reason that to postpone structural adjustment is to create even a bigger calamity later. They had their own self-fulfilling prophecy and logic. World Bank and IMF officials and their local agents pronounced the pain of sacrifice by the African population acceptable and necessary. These are people who never experienced poverty themselves.

The African countries were advised to export what they had and not to manufacture or add value to their primary resources, minerals, biological material and commodities. They were told they will benefit if they sell their primary resources, allow tourists, and expand services, and above all pay their debts while servicing their debts. They were never told that such a static conception of their comparative advantage may bring benefit but at the expense

of their ability to renew their resources rather than depleting it. Agricultural fields were turned into cash crop zones. Loans were used as incentives to convert agricultural land into cash cropping land. World Bank experts sanctimoniously advised it is either "export or perish." even when some of their leading officials admitted they do not know whether the result of structural adjustment will bring pain only or pain with benefits. Africa exported and some people prospered while the urban and rural poor literally perished from malnutrition and lack of health, education and other essentials. Their well being was subtracted. Their existence precariously hanged on a tightrope. Meanwhile the beaten state lived out its catch 22 neo-liberal dilemma by agreeing to liberalize more in the face of inequality and gross dereliction of the population. It took the blame for not providing social services while accepting with equanimity its forced retreat from providing such services. It accepted "good governance" while finding it difficult to behave "democratically" in the face of an irate public sick of the claw back on services such as education and health. Everyone must pay for education now thanks to the "demolition of the state" by structural adjustment.

State withdrawal from public service provision and the economy was effectively enforced by the disciplinarian Bretton Woods Institutions whose arrogance and power seem to have been boosted by the collapse of the Soviet system. If whole zones of the world hitherto protected from capitalist social relations are forced back into the capitalist orbit, Africa cannot use the state to deter the international citizenship of capital. So the state was to be expelled from the economy and private firms were to take over every arena of hitherto public activity in Africa. The Soviet collapse opened for a sort of revolution for profit, private property, privatization and deregulation in the world. The pressure continues to mount against all those who wanted to retain some degree of control over their national affairs. The state is out and civil society is in. The discourse of civil society and rhetoric regarding its putative efficiency more than the state took off in Africa as indeed else where.

Thus the fall of the Berlin Wall favored the market and the private firm to assert themselves in economic and public lives. The result of their activity was supposed to trickle down to the least advantaged and the poor. The state was assigned the role of the night watch man (Hayek). Its doctoring role severely reprimanded, it found itself a mere legal protector of private property including the personal safety of the men of property. Any other role other than a policing function was claimed to be none of its business. The ruling belief became that state failure is worse than market failure. Such a literal and text-bookish imposition of the market in an unequal society aggravates conflict and divisive activities. To be sure 1989 did not bring this state of affairs to Africa. What it

did was to legitimize it and expand the scope of market relations in every arena of African public life.

The promoters of the neo-liberal ideology became triumphalists; there was no chance in hell they would listen to alternative ideas or allow public debate not framed within the market discourse. For them the "End of Communism" was read also the "End of History." And thus public debate froze and no one can think and recommend alternative economic ideas or policies in the face of the veritable collapse of the entire Soviet edifice. The consequence was thus broadly negative: state imposed tyranny gave way to market-imposed tyranny. State intervention was debunked in favor of something like a "market totalitarianism." And this market anchored neo-liberal theological imposition characteristic of the Reagan-Thatcher episode turned Africa into a virtual guinea pig. Death, despair and dereliction mounted. And these did not deter the neo-liberals safe in their comfortable hideouts to demand for more of the same market medicine to cure Africa's chronically unbalanced budgets. Africa was interesting not because it had people but because the young Turks in the World Bank and the IMF can use it as the site of experiment to test their smug, outlandish and nefarious neo-classical hypotheses and theorems. Spending limits on education, health, and infrastructure and so on decreased in a cascading order on a downward slope. And the more the pain, the more zealous the recommendation to cut deeper. The surgeon has to sharpen his knife, so it seems, the more the soul protests it may lose its breath! Even if you die, it is better you do so with loans from foreign banks in your pocket, so went the conventional wisdom. If you cannot pay the debt and debt servicing, future generations will. And there is an implicit black mail to this recommendation: allowing cutbacks on the loans, grants and credits may affect future generations if not the current generation, borrow to make their life better when they come! That is to say, borrow even on their behalf-the yet unborn! Beggars cannot be choosers. One African country after another, one by one surrendered to the World Bank and the IMF diktat. African states took out the loans, concessionary grants and credits. The consequence was dramatic. Debts piled up. Volume of exports increased as prices sharply and longitudinally declined for the primary commodities. Instability was aggravated. Conflict was exasperated. Life lost its meaning and interest to the majority. State burden alternated with market burden. While those with assets to valorize through commodity circulation managed to gain something, the asset - less rural and urban majority were thrown into the deepest abyss imaginable.

HAS CONFLICT BEEN ATTENUATED OR EXACERBATED IN THE POST COLD WAR PERIOD?

Peace and stability are still elusive in Africa. One key expectation from the end of the cold war was that the numerous conflicts which were related to the cold war super power competition would have been attenuated. In Africa some positive outcomes did manifest as a consequence of the end of the cold war: South Africa's apartheid regime was removed. But the seeds of destruction sown during the cold war persisted in many conflict situations. Even those like Eritrea and Ethiopia, which fought together and amicably split the country into two states as friends, turned against each other and reverted into major full scale war less than eight years into the fall of the Berlin Wall. The heart of Africa—both of the Congo Republic have been in turmoil. This is an area larger than Western Europe and rich with mineral resources. Fanon used to say and I paraphrase—"Africa is like a revolver; and the Congo basin is the trigger. Who ever holds the trigger holds the future of Africa." It seems this conflict has attracted four sets of actors: the major powers, the African states: Sudan, Chad, Zimbabwe, Angola, Rwanda and Uganda. The arms traders and the major transnational companies which did not want to lose their privileged access to the mineral wealth of the African heartland. Some twenty two African countries continue to be in a state of conflict as this line is being written. Somehow the dropping out of the Soviet Union should have encouraged conflict reduction across the board in the continent. But this did not happen except in a few cases. The bellicosity and belligerence outlived the end of the cold war, suggesting how difficult it is to put behind the seeds of destruction sown during the cold war. Angola is the prime case where the cold war conflict created an entrenched and intractable conflict situation turning the country into one gigantic mine field. Millions have lost life, sight and limbs.

The post cold war pattern of conflict is similar in all other cases. Let me put it in a typical scenario. A country, say, Sudan is threatened with a guerrilla insurrection. Refugees flee and are accepted by the neighboring countries. Sudan also accepts refugees from neighbors. The refugees serve as a rear for manpower and finance to destabilize each state. The pattern continues to be enacted in other places. Conflict endures. The situation attracts all those who wish to profit from the persistence of the conflict. Soon they develop a political economy in the continuation of the regime of death. They cynically begin to speak that it is Africans who kill Africans and there is nothing they can do except to make money out of the ensuing killing fields. A neat evasion of moral responsibility.

While the competition between the former USSR and the US is playing no more to trigger these internal conflicts, other actors from arms traders to companies

have entered the fray. Conflict has thus become endemic in Africa. Each region of Africa continues to experience trouble: In the north Morocco is engaged with the front in the Sahara; Algeria with front of the Islamic movement and Sudan with the Movement for the Liberation of Sudan. In the west Sierra Leone is still in the state of civil war. In the Great Lakes region, the most unspeakable horror took place with a massacre of over a million Tutsis and the continued chain reaction from that episode reverberates with ugly resonance in the region. Subsequently Hutus have been hunted down. The involvement of Rwanda in the Congo follows as much the ethnic trail as any disgust with Kabila's unstable leadership over the post-Mobuto Congo. The Rwandan mass murder was like the African holocaust which created the phenomenon of ethnic cleansing. The latter form of violence is as repulsive and endemic as it has taken place in the Balkans. And we have not seen the end yet!

The Horn of Africa remains as a region of intractable conflict where nearly all the states are belligerent towards each other. Eritrea has cut diplomatic relations with Djibouti; it is at war with Ethiopia and Sudan. It was also at war with Yemen. Born in 1993 as a new state, it acted like a new kid in the block flexing its muscle unable to let go its guerrilla mentality and method of mobilization. Any problem it seemed to have with its neighbors involved the use of force. It seemed to suggest the way to deal with problems others may have created to it, is to counter by organizing its own military mobilization and fight them with strenuous energy to give the supposed "enemy" a bloody nose. The leadership does not seem to know how to respond to difficult challenges except to deploy armed forces to contain any real or imagined threat. Dealing with rather than responding to problems often involving an unacceptable use of violence seems to be their style of problem-solving. What then can it mean to raise arms against all its neighbors? Does the challenge posed to Eritrea warrant resorting to the use of force, even if they may have been reasonable grounds for Eritrea to complain about one issue or another with all its neighbors? Angola is again in a state of civil war. Even South Africa itself intervened in Lesotho.

Ironically the more mineral wealth a country has, the more likely it is to fall to the speculative gaze of "soldiers of fortune" or mercenaries companies and military dealers. In Angola and also in Sierra Leone, it has been reported that companies have fueled the conflict rather than attenuate it. One would have thought they would recommend stability, but the story suggests that in fact they find that the prevailing instability is lucrative to them. For Example UNITA in Angola under Savimbi controls the diamond rich part of Angola. Angola has some of the best diamond fields in the world - "80% are of the highest gem quality." (*Third World Resurgence*, No.103, p.37) From 1992-1997 UNITA is said to have ran the biggest diamond-smuggling operation using the proceeds to

buy arms. Despite the UN sanctions, many observers have reported that diamond dealers are continuing to trade with rebels. Diamond fields which were handed to the Angolan Government from UNITA control were recovered by armed action by UNITA. The Angolan Government on its part uses the oil boom to finance its own war effort. There is no sign it is running out of cash. It appears that the dropping out of super power competition has been replaced by corporate and conglomerate competition (e.g. diamond magnets against oil magnets). The situation in the Congo which attracted so many types of interferences in the past and the present is largely due to the mineral wealth of the Congo basin. There, too many companies are involved now, as in the 60s the Union Minerale played a pivotal role in financing the mineral rich Katanga (now Shaba) to secede. This action paved the way for Lumumba's assassination. There may have been a super power retreat; but it seems other actors in the form of corporate power have come to the scene. Indeed some pattern for conflict continuation in the mineral rich areas seems to crystallize: companies, mercenaries and armed dealers are continuing in the post cold war period to benefit themselves at the expense of African lives.

Thus the overall picture that emerges is that military action and violence both internal and inter-state have been rife. The Organization of African Unity continues to mediate on all these conflicts but its resolutions are often ambiguous and do not seem to be enforced by the parties in conflict. The expected reduction in the violence threshold in Africa did not happen. Unfortunately, the end of the cold war did not bring generalized reduction of conflict to Africa.

ANY DIVIDENDS FROM THE REDUCTION OF THE ARMS RACE?

There was also expectation that the money that used to fuel the arms race will be re-funneled into a peace dividend after the events of 1989. This again proved to be too optimistic a prognosis. For Africa the peace dividend seemed to have become a peace penalty. The end of the cold war threatened the military industrial complex in the West. It soon found morally feeble western politicians to accept that the world is even more of a dangerous place after the end of the cold war than before it. Arms expenditure which began to be cut began to be restored. The domestic politics of the US was used craftily to spread the perception of increased danger and uncertainty in the world in order shore up and maintain military spending at the level it had been during the cold war. Ideas on "Clash of Civilization" were bandied about to create enough of an impression that the political economy of arms expenditure is still "value or return for money" for the protection of western citizens from Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and the periodic emergence of episodes associated with the reckless defiance's from Saddam Hussein and Milsovitch. Spending for

military R&D was increased to create new generation of weapons which are smarter, more intelligent with enhanced command, control and communication capabilities and thresholds. There were no funds from disarmament. The UN recommendation of 10% from disarmament to development did not happen. In fact official development assistance on the whole declined. Instead of a multi-civilizational world with the co-existence of such major civilizations as Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Orthodox Christian, African and so on, those inured with the mind set of the cold war theorize about the coming conflicts and clashes of civilization. The military industrial complex finds such ideas very attractive to continue demanding the lions share of expenditure for arms. The political economy of the military industrial complex has prevailed in spite of the end of the Cold War.

AFRICA'S ENTRY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY: TROUSERS DOWN OR HEADS UP!

Poverty and violence still diminish and oppress Africans. Politically the military may have retreated but its potential for intervention is still big. The economic, cultural and political fragmentation of the continent makes its intervention highly probable. A terror-less transition and norm-based transition is a luxury only stable and consolidated democracies can boast-not Africa except for a few cases. The democratic roots in Africa are still fragile.

On the economic front, some excellent ideas which, if implemented, can lift the continent have come from Africans. But these never saw the light of day. As soon as Africans get together and seem to find the way, the counter blast from the Banks and IMF comes like a hurricane. These agencies seem to think like this: "Who do you think you are - that you think that you can think?" This is the mode of communication with Africans by those whose attitude is loaded with arrogance and paternalism. Africans are told to follow the intellectual priorities of these agencies. Africa's agency freedom is suppressed to give way to the agency freedom of the "Washington Consensus." And if some refuse, they invite ridicule and derision until they break and accept the ideas of the world multi-lateral agencies by rejecting their own. Recall how the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action for a 20-year structural transformation, food self-sufficiency, and economic integration of Africa never saw the light a day. Its approach and solution are still valid, but the Bank refused to fund Africa's solutions to Africa's problems. The Bank called on one Elliot Berg to produce a Report which came a year later. One African country after another went for the Berg recommendation abandoning the Lagos Plan of action shamelessly before the signature dried. Berg's plan sold the market to African states as the "sole director" of human affairs and such a choice ended up to use Karl Poyani's

observation "demolishing society" and complementing the demolition of the state by structural adjustment.

The spread of conflict after the end of the Cold War is one of the most serious challenges confronting Africa. Rather than conflict reduction, the continent seems to attract conflict conflagration. The spread of conflict especially in the Congo Basin is the most threatening to the continent at present time. Though the dropping out of cold war rivalry is to be welcome in Africa, it has not led to a condition where violence and poverty can be eradicated in the continent. The legacy of that period still bleeds the continent (e.g. Angola). The continent continues to suffer from growing conflict and lack of definition of its own identity and destiny in a changing world. Conflict persists with no "visioning" how to control it. New actors supplant old ones. And those who are making war seem to earn lucrative commissions from the arms trade. There appears to be a political economy of conflict exacerbation rather than conflict resolution. Peace and stability seem to have neither normative and nor a moral categorical imperative in Africa.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Though one set of unwelcome interference may have ended, it is Africa's unique experience that it has been substituted by another train and set of unwelcome and uninvited intrusions. First came slavery from the year 1500 for 400 years until the 1880s. Then came the 100 years casual tearing up of the continent during the Scramble for Africa from which it has inherited the so-called 58 odd state-nations which Africa's selfish elite is trying desperately to hold together. Then came the Cold War rivalry. And now there is a world hegemonic power dictating through the Washington consensus how African states and the populations must be disciplined. The continent had no moment to breathe without the negative noise from the Banks and the aid industry crowding its spirit and destroying its soul. All-in their different ways act to make Africans dependent even when the continent has resources to help not only itself but also the world. Africans must try to find their own bearing.

Africa needs to recover its own sense and sensibility, repair its fractured values presently suspended between African tradition and European imitation. It needs to get a grip and outlaw that violence and poverty have no justification in such rich continent with 650 million people in the sphere of politics, economies, culture, governance and daily living. Africa's wretched of the earth are entitled to a new deal by rejecting the joint transnational and African elites deal which has not brought about joy to their joyless existence to date. If Jews from all types of races, languages, cultures can come together and form one powerful sense in Israel, I cannot see why Africa cannot build a political and economic

identity on an African scale and re-launch a moral, intellectual and human presence to re-capture the historical moment which was not exploited in the 60s despite K. Nkrumah's phenomenal admonition not to fall prey again to divide and rule by forming a union of African states much like the union of states in America.

It has been said human beings do make their own history; though not entirely as they wish; they do so only with inherited circumstances. Africa's inherited historical circumstance is slavery, colonialism and continued interference in African affairs. Together these have molded the existing economic, social, political and psychological temper of the African situation. In particular, these unwelcome intrusions have deeply spread a feeling of worthlessness so deep they have furrowed the African spirit and African psyche planting an inferiority complex which has been hard to expel or heal. True, the external impact is differentiated and thus many may point out it may not be read as a homogenous affair. I say, however, the political, psychological, economic and cultural impact on Africans in the continent and outside was for all practical purposes uniform, a point which, I believe justifies looking Africa as one entity. Even if there are exceptions, one does well by imagining the "African community" as a positive way of exorcising an oppressive past. Africans should learn to claim this common past not to feel victimized by it but to escape and transcend it by a positive combination, reason, dialogue and conversation amongst them. Africa's shared history is real. It is a sufficient and necessary shared history to provide all Africans irrespective of color, creed, ethnic origin, location and language, an essential unity to their human identity.

From such a historical tradition of common and prolonged oppression must come an African historical imagination and future to overcome the negative legacies of the past. A shared collective memory must beget a new African collective memory. Africa is perfectly entitled to read its past in order to remove the ugly legacies of the past. Paradoxically the over half a millennium years of deadening oppression frames the contours of Africa's liberation. Africa can learn and imagine and mobilize selectively symbols, icons, heroes, and episodes from that oppressive past to create vast possibilities for the generations in building Africa's future by the handiwork of Africans themselves. As a noted American thinker likened history to a reservoir of human experiences out of which each generation can identify its own currents and flows, let this generation of Africans hurry to select (as the first post-independent progressive leadership tried to do in the 60s), the main current and flow which resolves the essential tension of Africa's historical and current oppression. In 1944 this noted thinker said:

Without the perpetual rediscovery and reinterpretation of history, without free access to that reservoir, the life of any single generation would be but a trickle of water in a desert. The limited conventions of historians have made us forget, however, that history has an anticipatory side: it is the domain of the possible, the starting point of the ideal... the creation and selection of new potentialities, the projection of ideal goals, is, with reference to the future, the counterpart of an intelligent commerce with the past.

(Lewis Mumford, 1944)

Africans should mount an intelligent commerce with Africa's historical past and convert their earlier and current victimisations into a potential current, flow and resource for Africa's liberation. Africa should not oppress itself by the enormity of the problems before it. It should learn to convert problems into challenges. Africa should hold the dialogue for Africa now and begin the long march of critical engagement by changing the oppressive reality that confines it. Humility and knowledge should bury and expel the usual qualification or diploma based hubris from the African intelligentsia. Africans must humbly combine their energies and resources to shape and craft the destiny and future of their continent in order to make Africa stand tall with its heads up rather than enter the century coming with its trousers down.

In the end, it is hard to prescribe a shopping list for a solution to Africa's manifold political, economic and security problems. And I am not sure any body can or worse still whether a shopping list is desirable at all. What is needed is a sea change in Africans' attitude about Africa. There is an African interest, an African identity and an African sensibility. Africa is a geographical, political and economic community. It is perfectly sensible to organize political and economic associations against decay and prosperity on a continental scale. A Pan-African social movement and a public perception for Africa's future must be built up. Then Africa will happen and endure. The feeling of defeat must be defeated regarding the supposed unreality of the African project for unity. It is the most real alternative on the African agenda. Africa must be built by building and organizing the African data. Africa has to get out of the mess it is in. Africa should not surrender to pessimism, doing so will mean loss of "visioning" and imagination. When imagination is murdered, there is nothing left except for the usual list of complaints which bring no solution and relevance to anyone. Africa must get out of this wrong turn of mind. Africans need both optimism of the will and the intellect to forge ahead so that the continent can march proudly with its human dignity and liberty.

A bridge between continental (the world in Africa) and cultural Africa (Africa in the world) is important to imagine and make just like cultural India and cultural China have linked up with mainland India and China. The unity of African states and the struggle against oppression by Africans in the Diaspora are linked. As continental Africa forges an economic and political integration on the principles of building a shared African identity and participation in the African union by communities on the basis of their own self-definition, cultural Africa scattered throughout the world can add knowledge and energy in building up this imagination and unified architecture. The support of cultural Africa to continental Africa has been instrumental to decolonise the continent through the planning and mobilisation of the Pan- African congresses since 1900. The same energy from the African world can be brought to bear to accelerate the rapid industrial transformation of the continent. Growth in the economic and political strength of the continent will assist the reduction of racism that cultural Africa continues to confront, partly related to the failure of Africa to be productive. And conversely the more racism is reduced the better will be Africa's opportunities to build up itself economically, industrially, politically, morally and culturally. Thus reduction of racism in cultural Africa against Africans is dialectically twinned with the economic, political and industrial build up of the African continent. Just as Japan's rise reduced the racism against the yellow race, by building Africa there will be an attenuation of racism directed against Africans.

As Africa begins the march of another one thousand years, the moral, intellectual and political challenge of the 21st century is to bring African renewal on Africa's terms. The simple message is that let the building of Africa be in the hands of Africans. This simple truth: that African solutions to Africa's problems must be owned by Africans must be told and retold with courage, humility and knowledge. The real challenge is for Africans to unite in freedom to express well-being development by starting from the bottom in society. It remains Africa's challenge of the 21st century. And there is no alternative to this historical course, except concentrating Africa's efforts to make the social innovation which will build Africa: and that is developing a shared principle for realising African unity.

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